



HELPPFILE

How do I network Vista with XP?

Q I have two computers connected to an ADSL router. One is running Windows XP Professional Edition and the other has Vista Ultimate. Both computers can access the internet, but they can't see each other. I have set the workgroup on both machines to be the same, and set up sharing with two partitions and printers.

The network used to work when both computers were running Windows XP Professional Edition. I suspect the network worked in one direction then, but now it doesn't work in either direction.

Fred Lyons, fred_lyons@hotmail.co.uk

A Windows Vista has added a few bells and whistles to the network setup, designed to make it easier in the long term. However, in the short term these may cause problems when connecting with previous versions of Windows.

For each network (IP range) that Windows Vista discovers, you have to define a location type: Home, Work or Public. The instructions say that if you are not certain you should choose Public, but what is not made clear is that choosing Public will disable network file sharing over that network. Home and Work are treated as private networks over which you can safely share files.

The other big difference in Vista's networking is that file sharing is turned off by default. You must go to Control Panel, Network and Internet, then Network and Sharing Center to turn on file sharing and printer sharing. Further down this screen there is an option called Password Protected Sharing, which is on by default. When password protection is on, only people with a user account and password on that computer can access shared files, printers attached to the computer or the Public folder. Initially, it's easier to turn this off. You can turn it back on and set up appropriate user accounts once you have got file sharing working.

Windows Vista has a new graphic feature called Network Map. By default, this shows only your computer, the gateway device and the internet. If you

click on View Full Map, it will also show other devices, including Vista-based computers. However, the map will not include computers running older versions of Windows or other operating systems. The network map is based on a new Microsoft protocol called Link Layer Topology Detection (LLTD). To be recognised, a computer has to have LLTD installed and enabled.

Microsoft has released an LLTD responder for Windows XP computers, which you can download from <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/922120>. This is only needed to show the pretty pictures and not to share files.

On the Windows XP computer, you need to make sure file sharing is enabled. From the Control Panel, run the Network Setup Wizard and, when asked for a workgroup name, choose WORKGROUP or the workgroup name the Vista computer is using. Don't use the default suggestion of MSHOME. Windows 98 and Vista use WORKGROUP as the default.

FIREWALL ASSISTANCE

If you are using the Windows firewall, this is all you need to do because the wizard will set the firewall to allow file sharing. However, if you are using a third-party firewall, you should check the user manual to see how to enable file sharing.

If file sharing is still not working after following these steps, your problem is probably with a third-party firewall. Vista's Network Diagnostics does not help much with this. Many new Vista computers are preinstalled with trial versions of McAfee or Norton security software. These firewalls are notorious for interfering with file sharing unless you make sure the network type is set properly.

Usually, you have to go to the firewall setup screen and check the local network's IP range is set as a trusted network (equivalent to the Vista firewall's Private network), or whatever terminology your firewall uses. If you are still having problems then you may have to uninstall the third-party firewall and use the Windows firewall instead.

CONTACTS

PLEASE EMAIL THE
RELEVANT DEPARTMENT

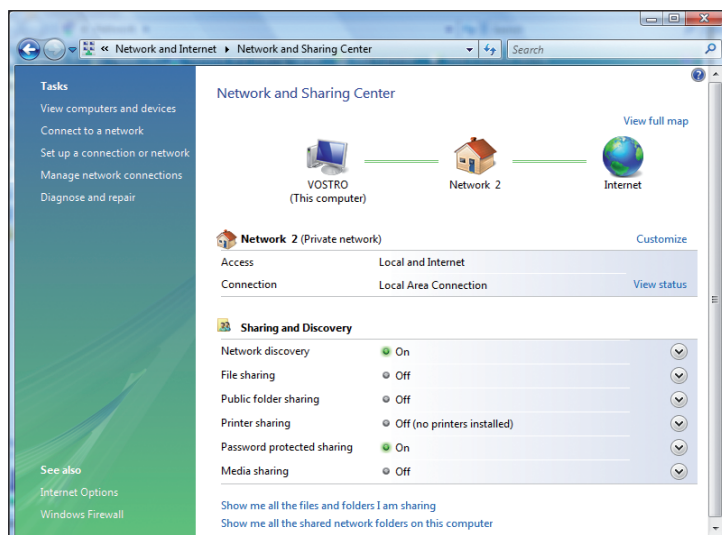
helpfile@computershopper.co.uk
for all PC problems

softwarehelp@computershopper.co.uk
for help with software applications

buyinghelp@computershopper.co.uk
for advice on PC purchases

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO US AT:

Help
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London
W1T 4JD



◀ Windows Vista's new
Network and Sharing Center
can help set up file sharing



Laptop backlight problems

Q The backlight on my 15-month-old Compaq Presario V5000 laptop's screen has broken. I'm led to believe that it's such a costly job to repair it would make more sense to invest in a new laptop.

I have hooked up the laptop to a plasma screen TV with a PC input as a temporary measure, so I can manage for the time being, but only in one room of the house. Is the laptop a write-off, or is a virus or spyware causing it to malfunction?

Dewi Davies, dewiallinos@btinternet.com

A It should be fairly easy to determine if this is a software- or hardware-related issue when you first turn on the computer. At that stage no software, except for the computer BIOS, has been loaded. If there is no image visible, or just a very dark image, and the screen's brightness controls have been turned up, the problem is going to be related to hardware.

While it is possible that your screen backlight has failed, it would be unlikely on such a new computer unless there was some physical damage to the screen. The backlight is usually a small cold cathode fluorescent tube attached to either the top or bottom of the LCD panel. This light then reflects off the shiny back surface of the LCD panel and shines through the coloured LCD crystals.

Although it is possible to replace the backlight tube, this is often a very delicate task, as the tube is thin and flexible, and it is usually covered by the reflective foil that covers the entire back of the screen. It is also hard to get the new backlight to illuminate the screen evenly. However, backlights are much cheaper than new screens, so it may be a worthwhile exercise. Bigger LCD screens such as those used as desktop flat-panel screens may use multiple backlight tubes, which are often connected in series, so that if one fails they all go out. It is far more likely that your backlight is not working because the inverter board has failed.

The inverter converts low voltage DC power to AC power at a sufficiently high voltage to power the light. Inverters are relatively cheap components, and often available from eBay for under £20. They are usually easy to fit yourself, too. The Compaq V5000 series uses the same screen and inverter as the HP dv5000, but often there are different makes of screen used in apparently identical systems, so make sure you get the correct inverter to match the screen fitted to your system. Check the spare part number on your existing inverter board before ordering one. The most common one is HP spare part number 407800-001.

The display inverter is a long, narrow circuit board, approximately 125x10mm, which is located inside the screen assembly on most laptop computers, including this model. To confirm, you should check the maintenance and service manual for your system. This is available from the HP website at <http://h10032.www1.hp.com/ctg/Manual/c00700903.pdf>.

On some models, the inverter is inside the base unit close to the screen. To dismantle the screen assembly on your Compaq, you will need to remove six screws that are covered by rubber caps and carefully prise apart the two parts of the casing. A guitar plectrum is a good tool to avoid scratching the plastic parts.

INVERTER TESTING

Testing an inverter is tricky, although you can check power is getting to it by connecting a DC voltmeter to pin 1 and a suitable ground point. You can't use a multimeter to test output as the output is alternating at a very high frequency, which will be produced only when a suitable load is attached. As the output voltage will be very high, great care is needed in connecting anything to it.

Laptop repair shops keep a selection of spare backlight tubes (sometimes including old, cracked LCD screens with working backlights) so they can test the inverter by plugging a known good tube into the inverter output. Otherwise, it is easier to buy a replacement inverter and see if that fixes the problem.

Your experts

HELPFILE

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Paul Mullen

With 27 years of PC experience as a power user, programmer and IT consultant, Paul Mullen answers all PC problems, tackling hardware, system and security issues.



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SOFTWARE HELP 178

Kay Ewbank

Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



Ben Pitt

Professional musician and keen photographer Ben Pitt gives advice on using creative software.



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BUYING HELP

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Chris Finnamore

Labs Manager Chris Finnamore recommends the best products for your requirements.



buyinghelp@computershopper.co.uk

Feedback Finding laptop parts



After reading your reply to Katerina Michaels (*Helpfile, Shopper 237*) in which she discusses replacing a laptop keyboard, I would like to suggest some other places from which I have successfully sourced components.

First of all, you could try non-UK eBay sites. If you pay by PayPal, you can often secure bargains, particularly if buying parts from the US at the moment. The US eBay always seems to stock more parts than the UK.

Alternatively, try an online laptop parts specialist. These are often very expensive, but they are useful if you must have that part urgently and are happy to pay the premium. There are also computer fair laptop specialists. Last time I had to replace a keyboard on a Mitac chassis laptop, I found the part online with a specialist for £120, which was too much. I then lost an eBay auction where one went for around £30. I went to the laptop specialist at the weekly motorcycle museum computer fair in Birmingham and got a sealed manufacturer's original for £40, after some haggling.

Sometimes, if you are nice when you contact the original manufacturer (not the reseller), they will

send you a part cheaply. I once managed to source a laptop screen like this by sweet-talking someone on the phone.

Simon Grimshaw, si_grimshaw@hotmail.com

A In this case, Katerina was extremely fortunate because the machine was made by MSI and sold under the manufacturer's own brand name. The anonymous manufacturers, whose machines are badged with a variety of different brand names, are usually much harder to obtain parts from.

Katerina wrote back: "Your tips were very useful, and I managed to remove the panel above the keyboard easily to expose the two screws holding the keyboard in place. I called MSI (UK) and it took my order for a new keyboard and, apart from a small delay due to a wrong postcode, I received the part within a few days.

"Five minutes later, I had successfully installed it. I commend MSI's laptop support department for their constant and rapid email communications with me through the whole process. I had previously thought that service like this no longer existed in the UK."

CONTACTS

Please contact the relevant department at the email address listed above. You can also write to us at:

**Help
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London
W1T 4JD**

Please try to give full details of your problem. We need an email address or daytime and evening telephone numbers in case we need more information.

Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in Help so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to the relevant Help department above). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so. ➔

How do I stop all this spam?

Q I am a senior citizen who enjoys using my PC for banking, savings, shopping and communicating with family and friends. My ISP is Freeserve. The problem I have is receiving unwanted emails, usually around 30 or 40 a day. I have just returned from a week's holiday and found I had received almost 400.

My email address is mike@<username> but I get emails sent to me@<username>, 123@<username> and many others. These unwanted messages are mixed up with my genuine messages, which means I have to delete each one separately.

My internet security is provided by F-Secure Internet Security 2007, which was recommended by *Shopper*. The spam control is enabled with the filter set to Aggressive (Medium was hopeless). Is there any spam-filtering software available that will allow only emails addressed to me?

*Mike Trollen,
mike@mtrollen.freeserve.co.uk*

A Because of new techniques used by spammers, the only effective way to filter spam is to compare messages being sent to large numbers of users. This approach is especially effective when users' reports of spam are used to filter other users' incoming mail.

There have long been filtering services that offered this service to big businesses. Many, such as MessageLabs, which processes Dennis Publishing's email, cater only to corporate users. However, Cloudmark, one of the most effective collaborative spam-filtering services, has a service for individual users called Cloudmark Desktop (www.cloudmark.com/desktop). This works only with Outlook or Outlook Express, but the company is beta-testing a version for Mozilla Thunderbird. It costs US\$40 (around £20) a year.

Among the big free email services, Google Mail and Yahoo! also battle spam effectively. Google's Google Mail service has always had powerful spam filtering, catching around 99 per cent of spam, with very few cases of genuine mail misclassified as spam. This makes it almost as effective as Cloudmark. Yahoo! has recently improved its spam filtering and some users report great results, although it is still not quite as good as Google Mail. Hotmail and AOL also filter out spam, but tend to be too aggressive, classifying genuine mail as spam unless you add senders to your address book.

Google now provides mail-handling services for your own domain (see <https://www.google.com/a>). As my old spam filters grew less effective, I switched so my own domain's email is processed by Google Mail. This service is free for domains with up to 25 users.

INDEPENDENT EMAIL

We suggest that users get an email address that is separate from the one that comes included with their internet connection. ISP's email services mostly do not provide very good spam-filtering services, and if you change broadband providers, you will have to change your email address, too.

At one time, the best way to get an independent email address was to get your own domain name, but these days Google Mail provides a free and reliable way for you to have a permanent email address. You can either use the web-based interface, accessing it from anywhere and using Google's search abilities to find a particular email, or else you can download it with an email client such as Outlook Express or Windows Mail.

Freeserve (otherwise known as Wanadoo or Orange) uses the customer's username as a sub-domain, so that you can use any name in front of the @ sign of the email address. This is useful if you want to add separate email addresses for family members. It also used to be useful as a spam-fighting device. Whenever you were asked for your email address by a website, you could make one up and then, if that address was used by spammers, you could abandon it and set a filter to delete all mail sent to it. Unfortunately, spammers now target a domain name and try many different usernames at that domain. This accounts for the mails you have started to see.

Those who own their own domain will find it best to reject all mail that does not match an existing mailbox or alias. You should set up aliases for common misspellings (such as Alan instead of Allen), as well as the postmaster and abuse addresses for which internet standards require every domain to accept mail.

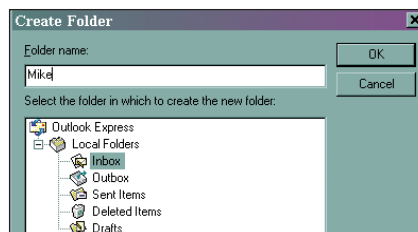
REJECTION RULES

Unfortunately, Freeserve does not seem to have any way to reject mail that is addressed to unused email names, and nor does Outlook Express. You can filter out mail that is addressed to a particular name, but you cannot filter out mail that is not addressed to that name. The best that you can do with Outlook Express is to set up a new folder called Mike inside your inbox and then create a mail-filtering rule that moves any mail into it that is actually addressed to mike@yourname.freeserve.co.uk.

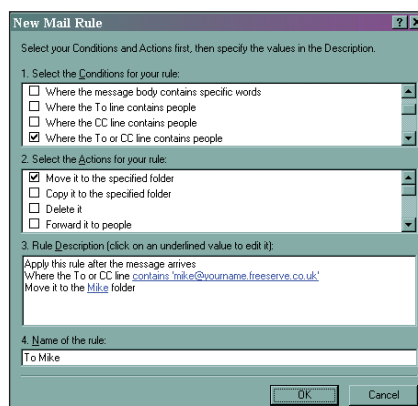
First you need to make sure that you have selected the Folder List in View, Layout. Then right-click on Inbox, select New Folder and name it Mike, and this will create a folder inside the inbox. You will then need to create a rule to filter incoming email addressed to you into that folder. First, highlight a message that is addressed to you. Then select Create Rule from Message from the Messages menu. This opens the New Mail Rule window.

Uncheck the From rule, which will be selected by default. Then you need to select 'Where the To or CC line contains people'. In the box below this, labelled '2. Select the Actions for your rule', you need to select the action called 'Move it to the specified folder'. Then, in the third box, you should click on the blue links and make sure that your email address and the correct folder are selected.

Finally, in the fourth box, give the rule a meaningful name, such as To Mike. Once you have created the rule, go to Tools, Message Rules, Mail and select the rule. Click on Apply Now to move existing message into the Mike subfolder. The rule will be applied to new messages automatically.



▲ Create a new folder in Outlook Express



▲ Filter new mail addressed to you into that folder

FIGHTING BLIND

That takes care of all mail addressed directly to you. However, sometimes genuine messages will arrive that do not contain your name in the To or CC fields. You need to ensure that you filter these into the Mike folder, too. The rule already mentioned won't help because these messages were sent with your email address in a blind copy (BCC) field. Most of these emails will be from bulk mailing lists that you have joined, but you may also find that a friend has sent out a party invitation and added everyone to the BCC field. If you don't want to miss these emails, you will have to set up additional rules to deal with them, and this is not straightforward.

In order to reach you, the email would have to have been addressed in some way to your email address. That information will have been on the email's SMTP envelope; this is information that is removed by your ISP's mail server and cannot be seen by the recipient. However, many (though not all) ISPs add the SMTP envelope information as an additional non-standard header. If you right-click on a message in Outlook Express and select Properties and the Details tab, you'll see the headers.

Often this header will say something like X-Envelope: or X-apparently-to:. If you can find the format your ISP uses, many email clients will allow you to set up a filter on non-standard headers such as this. Unfortunately, Outlook Express doesn't. The best you can do is to set up a separate filtering rule based on either the sender or subject line for each list from which you receive messages.

You should be able to filter most of the messages in the inbox into a separate folder using Outlook Express. You will still have to go through the inbox manually to select any additional messages that you want. For better filtering, we would suggest you switch to Google Mail or consider subscribing to a service such as Cloudmark Desktop.

Combining two broadband connections

Q I am a web application developer. While I can install new hardware in PCs, I am not a networking or hardware specialist. My company has three computers, one network-attached storage device (NAS) and two broadband connections. These are currently configured as two separate networks, using two routers. I would like to set these up on one Gigabit network and I would also like to configure my new network to use both broadband connections and make the NAS accessible to all the computers.

In addition, I am confused because I am installing Cat6 cable, and it seems there are two different standards for wiring the wall sockets. Should I use T568-A or T568-B?

Mark Woodroof,
mark.woodroof@mqm.co.uk

A We are wondering why you have two broadband connections when you have only three computers on the network? Usually a second broadband connection is needed only when there are more than a dozen computers trying to share a single connection and all are using the internet intensively.

Maybe you are using a lot of high-bandwidth applications, or your broadband connections are slow because of the distance from the exchange. Possibly the second connection is a backup in case the first connection goes down. Whatever your reasons, there are now quite a few small but powerful office routers that offer dual WAN connections. All these routers are based on Linux, and you could set up an old computer using multiple network cards to use as a Linux-based router. There are several articles on the internet about how to modify Linux for multi-

home routing. Start with the discussion at www.ssi.bg/~ja/nano.txt.

All approaches have the same limitation in that you can't combine both connections simultaneously to speed up downloads of a single large file. You can, however, download two files at once, and then each would use a different DSL line, or two users could be using one line each. There is no sophisticated load-balancing algorithm used here, and each new connection is assigned to any available line at random. This means two big transfers could both end up sharing the same line by chance, while two other low-traffic sessions use the other. With a larger number of users, say more than 12, loads should end up being balanced equally.

If you don't have lots of spare time and a desire to mess with Linux, and you don't have an advanced knowledge of TCP/IP networking, the best solution is to buy a router that already has dual WAN connections. There are now several of these available. They are often called load balancing routers, although most just use the same Linux code discussed above with its very primitive load balancing.

Since there do not seem to be any load balancing routers with two built-in ADSL modems, you would need to use this with two DSL modems that have Ethernet ports, or else use your existing ADSL modem/routers and look for an option to set them to bridge mode. The cheapest we can recommend is the Linksys RV042, which has two WAN Ethernet ports and costs around £109. Since the Linksys, like other lower-cost dual WAN routers, does not have Gigabit ports, you would also have to use a separate Gigabit Ethernet switch.

Your internet connection speeds, even with two DSL lines combined, are unlikely to tax a 100Mbit/s Ethernet connection and won't come close to needing Gigabit hardware.

Alternatively, the Draytek Vigor 2950, which costs around £336, has far more sophisticated load balancing software, allowing you to set rules as to how the two WAN ports will be used. It has a secure firewall and includes five Gigabit LAN ports.

Both routers mentioned here will handle a failed DSL line automatically, routing all traffic to the remaining connection.

KNOWING THE STANDARDS

It doesn't matter which cabling scheme you use, provided that both ends are wired in the same way. The standard is called TIA/EIA-568-B and allows organisations to choose either of two wiring connections, which are called T568A or T568B. The two differ only in the green/orange pairs, which are reversed. The US government requires T568A, but many organisations stick to T568B. Confusingly, this is the same as an older standard called AT&T 258A.

To add to the confusion, the similarity between the name of the standard and the wiring connection diagrams it contains has caused many sources to label the T568A wiring as T-568-B, which is incorrect. Others assume that since the TIA/EIA-568-B standard superseded an earlier version called TIA/EIA-568-A, T568B must now be the preferred standard.

If you take a look at your Cat6 patch cables, you will see which wiring scheme is used. When you look at the wire colours through the clear plastic plug, the wire at one end (pin 8) will be brown and the wire at the other end (pin 1) will be white/orange or white/green. If it is white/orange, which is the most common variant, the cable is wired to T568B. If pin 1 is white/green, then it is T568A. Although it makes very little difference, there will be a marginal reduction in cross-talk if you follow the same standard for your wiring.

Problem connecting to webpages

Q I have recently had problems connecting to the internet. I have already checked with my broadband provider Virgin Media, and the connection and modem are OK. I have also made an expensive call to PC Helpline and I was talked through a number of commands, but I am still unable to link to webpages such as www.bbc.co.uk. I can send and receive emails via Outlook Express, but sadly not Hotmail.

I recently upgraded to the new MSN Messenger. Could this have created problems, or could it be a virus? McAfee is running every day, but it hasn't picked anything up. I did access a greeting card sent by a friend (via 123Greetings.com) and a message box appeared saying "Winerror fixer", which I couldn't close. This started appearing on the monitor whenever I started up the computer. Is this a simple problem that I could sort out with the right advice?

Pramila Sashidharan, psashidharan@blueyonder.co.uk

A You should beware of greeting cards from the 123Greetings.com website. McAfee SiteAdvisor (which we would strongly recommend to everyone) flags it as dangerous and warns: "Feedback from credible users suggests that downloads on this site may contain what some people would consider adware, spyware or other potentially unwanted programs."

It is possible that the website itself is not at fault, but that some third party has been using it to send virus-infected spam messages that appear to come from someone you know.

The key element is the 'Winerror fixer' message, which suggests that your computer is infected by spyware. WinErrorFixer is a variant of the SmitFraud family of rogue software. It claims to remove threats that are not really there, while installing spyware on your system.

Anti-virus programs are usually not very effective against spyware, but it is possible that McAfee might have detected and removed some component of the spyware without

repairing the operating system files to which it was attached. This can have the result of disabling Internet Explorer.

To remove spyware, you will need to add some additional software to your computer, which could be tricky if Internet Explorer is not working. Perhaps you can download them to another computer and then copy them to a CD. You could also try running Windows Restore to go back to a date before you were infected, although this does not always work.

It is best to run several different anti-spyware programs to give the best chance of removing all remnants of the spyware. We suggest that you download the free versions of AVG Anti-Spyware, Ad-Aware 2007 and Spybot Search & Destroy. You may also find it useful to download and run SmitFraud Fix from <http://siri.urz.free.fr/Fix>, because this is explicitly designed to repair the changes made by the WinErrorFixer pest.

Install and update all the software. If Outlook Express is working then the update should also work, but restart the computer in Safe Mode before scanning for spyware.

Confused by Vista backup issue

Q Whenever I try to run the Vista backup program to copy files to my DVD rewriter, the backup appears to run for five to 10 minutes and then I get the following error message: "The request could not be performed because of an I/O device error 0x8007045D." Although some files are written to the DVD, Windows says the backup is not complete and keeps asking to re-run the backup.

Having searched for this error message on Google I have found one workaround, which is to switch off the drive's restore points and then run the backup. Unfortunately, this does not work for me. Microsoft's response is to blame the DVD writer, but its drivers are up to date and it appears to be behaving normally. Others have reported the same error when backing up or transferring files to hard disks, which suggests a bug in Vista.

I have also seen a suggestion that there may be a conflict with Symantec AntiVirus, which is installed on my system. Can you suggest how to get around this issue? Failing that, can you recommend any cheap backup software?

John Porter, John.Porter@UCB-Group.com

A Lots of people are having this problem, particularly with Windows Backup and the CompletePC Backup program that comes with the Business and Ultimate versions of Vista. Annoyingly, the error does not tell you the cause of the problem. There are at least three different causes of the error, all of which give the same error code.

The first possibility is that there is a hardware problem with your DVD writer or with the media. This could be as simple as a bad cable, but this is probably not the case with your PC. The second possibility is that you are trying to back up certain files or directories to which you do not have the correct access rights. In this case, the error messages will list the specific files that are causing problems. However, even this is not the likely reason if you have Windows Vista Basic or Home Premium versions, especially if you are the only user. You should run Chkdsk to check that there is no corruption in the NTFS, which could cause Backup to get confused.

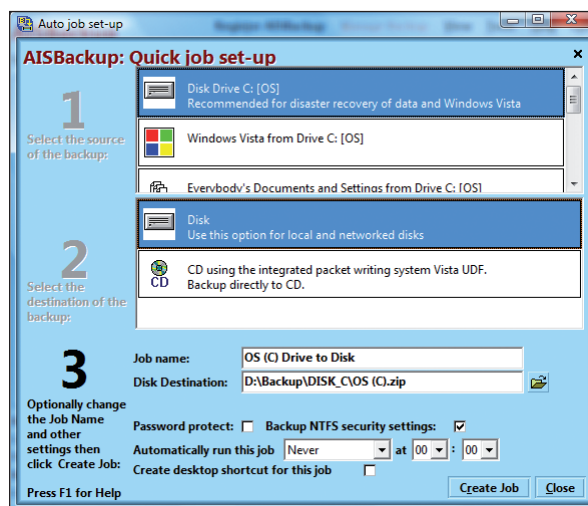
The third, and by far the most likely, cause of this error is a problem with the Volume Shadow Copy Service, which is used by both Backup programs. A shadow copy is a snapshot of a file's state at a particular point in time. It was introduced with Windows Server 2003 so you could go back to a previous version of a file you had accidentally overwritten.

That roll-back feature is available only in the Business or Ultimate versions of Vista. However, all versions of Vista use shadow copies for System Restore and also use them when doing backups, as they allow backups of files that are open. The backup requests a shadow copy of the file and then backs up that copy rather than the file in use. Space is needed for the shadow copies and for the Zip files that Vista creates before writing them to DVD.

The most common problem with the shadow copy system is that it runs out of disk space. Vista configures the maximum disk space to be used for shadow copies when the shadow copy service is first used. By default it selects 15 per cent of the drive capacity or 30 per cent of free disk space at that time, whichever is the lower.

With a 250GB hard disk (assuming this is formatted as a single partition), this should give plenty of space. But if you partitioned the drive into smaller partitions, or upgraded to Vista from an older version of Windows when the drive was already fairly full, you could have a lower limit. Several users have found that deleting restore points fixes the error because restore points use the same shadow copy space. We do not recommend deleting restore points completely, however. Use the Disk Cleanup utility, which you can find by choosing Programs, Accessories, System Tools. It has an option to remove all but the most recent restore point.

To see how much space is allocated to shadow storage, and how much has been used, you need to open an elevated command prompt. Click on Start, All Programs, Accessories and then right-click on the command prompt icon and



▲ AISBackup is a cheap and reliable program that works on Vista and even Windows 2003 Server

choose Run as Administrator. In this command window, you can type the command:

```
vssadmin List ShadowStorage
```

This command will report the shadow storage allocated and used on each disk volume. You can change the amount of shadow copy storage with a command like this, typed all on one line:

```
vssadmin resize shadowstorage /on=C: /For=C: /MaxSize=10GB
```

Finally, if you want to see what the shadow storage is being used for, type this command:

```
vssadmin List Shadows
```

This is going to give a very long list of entries.

There still seems to be something quirky about Vista Backup, or at least the simplified version included in the Basic and Premium versions. Perhaps it will be fixed by Service Pack 1. Even then, it might be wise to use an alternative backup program. AISBackup, which costs around £19 from www.aiscl.co.uk, works fine with Vista and even Windows 2003 Server. It is reliable, although some users find the interface looks old-fashioned. You can download and try it for 30 days before buying.

Making Windows Explorer start at C:\

Q I am running Windows Vista Home Premium on an Intel Core 2 Duo system. On opening, Windows Explorer defaults to C:\Users\Microsoft\Start Menu. Is it possible to change this to just C:\? It would be much better to default to the root drive than have to close down all the submenus.

Eric Notton, eric.notton@btopenworld.com

A It sounds like you are opening Explorer by right-clicking on the Start button and then choosing

Explore. When I do that using Vista Business Edition Explorer it opens at Users\username\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Windows\Start Menu. However, if you click on the Start button and then right-click on Computer (which is in the grey area, to the right of the Start menu) and choose Explore, you will get an Explorer window starting with the drives on your computer. In both cases, the behaviour is similar to the way in which Windows XP works. Right-clicking on any object and then choosing Explore should give an Explorer window starting from that object.

It is fairly easy to create a modified Explorer icon that does what you want. Open Explorer and navigate to the folder you want it to start from, in this case the root of the C: drive. Drag the small icon immediately to the left of the address bar on to an empty area of the desktop. This should create an icon that reads something like '(C) - Shortcut'. Close Explorer, then click on this icon to verify that it opens in the right place. Right-click on the icon and call it something like Explore C. Then drag it over the Start button, wait for a moment and, when the Start menu appears, drop it on to the menu.

Can I mix PATA and SATA drives?

Q I'm curious to know if you can mix SATA and PATA hard disks. I have a PC fitted with a Gigabyte GA-KE8VNPX motherboard with a Samsung Spinpoint SATA hard disk. Although the motherboard is fitted with RAID, I have been advised that it is really not possible to mix SATA and PATA hard disks in an internal RAID configuration.

Is it possible to fit an external hard disk enclosure with an older IDE PATA hard disk connected via a USB socket?

Stuart Nunn, snunn@toucansurf.com

A You should be able to install the older PATA hard disk as an internal drive, or an external drive using a USB2 or FireWire interface. Either way, you would not be able to use it as part of a

hardware RAID array. All the common motherboard RAID controllers require that drives in a RAID array should all use the same kind of interface and preferably be all the same size. If there are slight size differences, the RAID array will be based on the smallest drive size, and excess space on larger drives will be unusable.

You can also connect external SATA drives using a longer SATA cable and these could be used as part of a RAID array, although we do not advise it. If the external drive is not powered up, the RAID array may break.

When you mix SATA and PATA drives on the motherboard connectors, the BIOS setup determines which drive will be bootable. As this varies from one system to another, you will need to examine your BIOS setup program to see how to make a particular interface appear first in the boot order.

In certain BIOS setup programs, all RAID controllers are described as SCSI controllers. On some motherboards, it is not possible to change the boot order and, if both SATA and PATA drives are attached, we have found some motherboards always boot from the PATA drive, while others always boot from the SATA drive.

If your intention was to set up a RAID mirror, it is more effective to use a file-synchronisation program such as Fileback-PC (www.fileback-pc.com) or a backup program such as AIS Backup (www.aiscl.co.uk) to maintain a mirror drive. RAID mirroring guards only against the failure of one or other drive, and does nothing to protect against other causes of file loss, such as damage to the file system or by viruses. Both the products mentioned can maintain previous versions of a file, so that if the latest copy is damaged you can go back to an earlier version.

Getting online from my laptop

Q I use a D-Link DSL-G694T router to connect to the internet. My main PC is wired and my kids' laptop is wireless. I am having a problem connecting to the internet from the laptop. The wireless connection comes up and I can access the admin screen on the router and change router settings from the laptop.

I can monitor the internet connection from the laptop and see when the main PC is passing data. What I can't do is access the internet from the laptop and Windows won't monitor even a byte being sent to the internet, showing only bytes sent and received to the router. This is all the more frustrating because when I first got the laptop it almost linked itself up and worked. Any ideas?

Alan Hancock, alancom@tiscali.co.uk

A Presumably the router is set up with your Tiscali PPPoA login information and the desktop is set to use dynamic IP settings, which it gets from the router. You don't want to use any form of PPPoE/PPPoA login application or connection icon, as that function is handled by the router. Sometimes your broadband provider will send a CD that installs this software.

If your desktop is using a dynamic IP address, you can look at your desktop's IP settings by clicking on Start, Run, typing `cmd` and clicking OK. This opens a command prompt window where you can type:

```
ipconfig /all
```

Make a note of the IP address, Default Gateway address and DNS servers. Then try the command:

```
ping www.yahoo.com
```

Note the IP address that is returned. Since Yahoo! is so large, this will actually be the address of a local mirror server.

Then move on to the laptop. Open a command prompt there and try the `ipconfig /all` command. Compare the results with the desktop's output, which should look similar except for the actual IP address. The IP address has to be unique but must be in the same range as the default gateway.

Look carefully at the DNS servers specified. These should be the same as the desktop's if both computers are set to get DNS servers automatically. Occasionally, you may find that getting DNS servers automatically does not work and you have to set the DNS servers manually.

It is also usually safe to set the DNS server to the router's gateway address. Provided the router knows the correct DNS servers on the internet, it will be able to find out this information.

Since you have already demonstrated that your laptop can connect to the router and can display a webpage (the router configuration), either DNS is not working, thus preventing the conversion of site addresses to an IP address, or a firewall is blocking access to IP addresses outside the local network. Try the `ping www.yahoo.com` command again. If it says "host not found", either you mistyped the address or your DNS service is not working. If it gave the same IP address as before but says "request timed out" you have a firewall problem.

If the laptop uses the same DNS servers as the desktop, but is still not finding websites, the Windows installation could be damaged. The best way to repair it is to reinstall Windows over the existing installation.

If the problem is a firewall – and we have found this with damaged installations of both Norton and McAfee internet security packages – then you could try changing its settings. Sometimes you may have to uninstall it. If your internet security software is damaged, just disabling the firewall through its Control Panel may not be effective. Sometimes a damaged installation will not be removed completely. Both Symantec and McAfee have special removal tools on their websites that you can use to complete the process.

Is my friend spying on me?

Q For several days, I have been seeing a pop-up message called AVG E-mail Scanner appearing near the taskbar. Sometimes it appears every five minutes. It displays the following information: "AutoPOP3: Connecting to 194.217." Please can you tell me what this is? My PC is always up to date with the latest Windows patches and updates from AVG, and I have scanned my computer for any spyware, but the connection to this address is still happening.

I do know that this IP address belongs to my friend, who is a specialist in IT, and sometimes I ask him for advice. I am starting to suspect that he is spying on me. I hope that this is not true. He has been my friend for over 25 years!

Tom Wachowiak, tom_wit@hotmail.com

A The message that you mention means that some software on your computer (most likely your usual email program) is trying to receive email from a server at this address, which we have shortened to protect your friend's privacy. You only see this message if the mail takes a long time to download, so it will appear occasionally when you try to download a large message. This can also happen when your mail server is being particularly slow.

The message normally displays the name of the server, not an IP address. We believe that if you check your email client, under settings for your email accounts, then you should find this IP address listed on the servers tab. One possible explanation is that your friend has set up spam-filtering software on his server and has set your email client to request his server to collect mail from your ISP and then pass back to you the filtered email. ☑